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SUBJECT: FRIENDS OF AFGHANISTAN MEETING AT THE UN

¶1. This message is sensitive but unclassified: please protect accordingly.

¶2. (U) Participants:

U.S.
A/S Richard Boucher, SCA

AFGHANISTAN
Foreign Minister Rangin Dadfar Spanta

AUSTRALIA
Foreign Minister Stephen Smith

CANADA
Ambassador John McNee, Permanent Representative to the UN

DENMARK
Ambassador Carsten Damsgaard, Political Director

FRANCE
Ambassador Gerard Araud, Political Director
Ambassador Pierre Duquesne

GERMANY
Ambassador Volker Stanzel, Political Director

ITALY
Foreign Minister Franco Frattini

JAPAN
Ambassador Yukio Takasu, Permanent Representative to the UN

NETHERLANDS
Foreign Minister Maxime Verhagen

NORWAY
Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Store

UNITED KINGDOM
Ambassador Mark Lyall Grant, Political Director

UNITED NATIONS
Under-Secretary-General Alain Le Roy, Department of
Peacekeeping operations (DPKO)

Special representative Kai Eide (UNAMA)

¶3. (SBU) SUMMARY: This message contains an action request for USUN, please see paragraph 4. Norway hosted a meeting of the informal group of the friends of Afghanistan on the margins of UNGA on September 24. The meeting provided an opportunity to follow-up the implementation of the Afghan National Development Strategy endorsed at the June international conference in Paris in support of Afghanistan. UN Special Representative Kai Eide called on Friends to work together to reverse negative trends in Afghanistan by March 2009, by focusing on the following priorities: security (particularly police), local governance, anti-corruption, aid-effectiveness and increased civil-military cooperation. Friends of Afghanistan expressed support for Eide's recommendations.

¶4. (SBU) ACTION REQUEST: During the meeting, newly-appointed UN Under-Secretary-General Le Roy for peacekeeping confirmed UNSYG approval of budget requests to expand the UN Assistance Mission to Afghanistan. However, the formal budget approval in the UN requires that the proposal is reviewed by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) and put to a vote in the UN General Assembly 5th Committee (Administrative and Budgetary). This review and vote would likely take place in December. As expansion is a U.S. priority, the Department requests that USUN work with the Friends of Afghanistan on ways to accelerate consideration and approval of the budget. END OF SUMMARY AND ACTION REQUEST.

¶5. (SBU) Afghan Foreign Minister Spanta first reported on the worsening security situation in Afghanistan, mentioning the increase in the number of &Kashmiri jihadists8 in Afghanistan and the lack of control of the central government (3 out of 13 districts in Helmand are under government control). Despite this situation, Spanta underlined the steps taken to implement the national development strategy, including the appointment of the anti-corruption commission by President Karzai and the effort to reduce poppy production, which is down 19 percent this year. Mentioning civilian casualties, Foreign Minister Spanta pointed to the lack of coordination and to &wrong intelligence sources.8 He feared that further loss of civilian life would put the support of the Afghan population for the Coalition at risk.

¶6. (SBU) UN Under Secretary General Le Roy stressed that Afghanistan would remain a priority for the UN in the coming years and confirmed that the UN Secretary General had approved the expansion of the UN budget and personnel in Afghanistan. The UN had accepted a higher degree of responsibility over the situation without having the full control of the military or financial tools. It relied on the willingness of Friends to be coordinated and pledged the UN would make every effort to be convincing. He noted the UN was now a target of the insurgency, as three UN staff were killed in Southern Afghanistan last week. The international community and the Afghan government had to reverse the security situation as time was running out. He mentioned civil-military cooperation, aid-effectiveness and a fair electoral process as key to this effort.

¶7. (SBU) Special Representative Eide gave a frank assessment of the situation. After the Paris conference, he said, the international community had been distracted by the deteriorating security situation. Attacks were now happening in and around Kabul, not only in Southern and Eastern Afghanistan. He reiterated Le Roy's comment that the UN had now become a direct target of the insurgency. Civilian casualties, as highlighted by the Shindand incident, have also created additional tensions. The Coalition had to do its best to avoid this situation, but it was &time to move forward8 and to &come back to the Paris agenda.8

¶8. (SBU) Eide welcomed the decision by the Afghan government to create new structures for implementation of the national development strategy. He outlined the following challenges:

-- Elections: given less-than-perfect security conditions,

the Afghans had to strike a balance between security requirements and the need to see the process move forward.

-- Humanitarian assistance: the UN had made an appeal for USD 400 million, of which only 40 percent has been received. A failure in meeting the target would result in possible famine and new displacements of population. (Comment: the United States is committed to providing half of the 200,000 metric tons of food requested, and has already shipped 50,000 metric tons).

-- Afghan National Army expansion: Eide welcomed the decision, but expressed concern that the Afghan National Police might be forgotten as a result of an increased focus on the army. The police were in a miserable state and durable security would only be achieved through a stronger police, which would combat the insurgency, fight crime, and protect borders.

-- Governance: he stressed that subnational entities needed to be strengthened. While the creation of the independent directorate for local governance was welcomed with enthusiasm, implementation of the Afghanistan Social Outreach Program, however, was still pending, mainly due to a lack of coordination among donors. Eide vigorously called on Friends to stop negotiating separate agreements with the Directorate on the basis of their respective provincial interests and to adopt standardized procedures.

-- Corruption: the new mechanism was not enough and needed to be strengthened, but the trend was right. We need to support the new office and then see what more can be done. Eide also welcomed the creation of a National Institute for Public Management, but noted that it is under-resourced.

--Aid effectiveness: The UN was working on establishing criteria for increased transparency among donors, and Eide announced he would soon reach out to donors with proposals. (Comment: towards this effort, State will ask Embassies to approach governments in donor capitals, show them how our Paris pledge aligns to Afghan national strategy sectors, and encourage them to report similar information to the Afghan Ministry of Finance). He stressed the need for an equitable distribution of resources, as more and more countries were entrenched in a province-based approach. Donors were losing the nation-wide perspective of developing Afghanistan, which would diminish the impact of international aid and make the strategy unimplementable.

-- Civil-military coordination: Eide pointed to the difference of concept between the military and civilians. Rather than just considering civil-military coordination as a process of clear, hold and build, he wanted to sit down with General McKiernan to balance overall resource allocations of both civilian and military resources, based on an assessment of the political situation.

-- UNAMA: Eide described his mission as small and fragile and conveyed to the group his frustration that despite decisions that had been made in June in Paris, he would only be able to deliver a full response by spring 2009, due to UN procedures. He regretted the delay in achieving the surge of the UN in Afghanistan.

19. (SBU) The Friends offered unanimous support to Eide's assessment and expressed their commitment to the strategy endorsed in Paris in June.

110. (SBU) The Netherlands and Italy committed additional police training resources, notably through the European Police mission. Germany wondered whether the decrease in poppy production might be the result of a move by producers to keep the prices high. In a critical comment on slow improvements on the ground, the United Kingdom urged the Afghan government to accelerate implementation of the national strategy and the UN to move beyond rhetoric on coordination of foreign assistance. France expressed its concern that commitments made in Paris in June were

&fulfilled partly and slowly.⁸ Political Director Araud called on all parties to accelerate implementing the strategy.

¶11. (SBU) Boucher reiterated the call on Friends to implement the strategy and supported Eide's recommendations on police (more trainers and better structures) and local governance. Governors had to be empowered to exert real authority. Boucher agreed with Eide, Norway, Australia and Canada that the deterioration of the humanitarian situation needed to be addressed and recalled the figures of U.S. humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan (USD 170,000 in food aid and 100,000 metric tons of wheat).

¶12. (SBU) UK, Italy, the Netherlands, Japan and Australia mentioned improved Afghanistan-Pakistan relationship as a positive step. FM Spanta confirmed that he would travel to Islamabad on the first week of October to work on a common strategy⁸ to fight against terrorism and on the wider bilateral relationship. He also informed the group that a Regional Peace Jirga would be held on October 28-29.

¶13. (SBU) At Germany and UK's request, UN Under-Secretary-General Le Roy gave further details on the proposed increase in the Mission's budget and the expansion of the number of personnel. Now that the UN Secretary General and the UN controller have formally proposed the expansion of the UN Mission, the budget increase will have to be approved by the UN General Assembly 5th Committee (Administrative and Budgetary) after the review by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions. The review by the Committee and vote by the Fifth Committee would likely take place in December. Le Roy informed the group that he had authorized UNAMA to hire a higher percentage of staff on the current budget, but any pressure by Friends in the 5th Committee to expedite consideration of this matter might help. UK and U.S. called on Friends to urge countries in the 5th Committee to accelerate budget approval.
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